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ABSTRACT

In a small informal study of the process of children's writing, three children, aged 9, 10, and 11, were observed as they wrote. Specifically, the study sought to discover how the children approached the task of writing, the manner and extent of their interaction, and the result of this interaction upon their writing. Each child's writing was also examined to determine how it fit into the three modes of James Britton's model of language functions: expressive (language which remains close to the speaker), transactional (language to get things done), and poetic. In addition, the study attempted to discover what constituted a story to the children. Each child was told on the night previous to the planned writing activity to give some thought to the writing of a good story, and the actual writing was completed in approximately one hour in an informal setting. The results suggest that interaction among the children did not appear to interfere greatly with their finished stories and, despite the interaction, the children wrote individual stories. In terms of Britton's model, all three stories fell on the continuum between expressive and poetic writing. In addition, the children showed a clear idea of what a story should be like and used these notions in their writing. (Charts of the children's comments and behaviors during the activity and copies of their stories are appended.) (FL)

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OBSERVING CHILDREN WRITING : THE ACTIVITY AND THE PRODUCT

Often in our schools we observe a concern for the final outcome, the result, the grade. Of course, the outcome or result is of importance, but not to the detriment of our observation and our understanding of process. For such emphasis can mean that we as teachers reject or ignore the processes to which we should be paying much attention.

In children's writing, the final product may be separated into two relatively distinct components - the easily observable, so-called basic skills or conventions (spelling, punctuation and so on) and the not so readily observable content, that is, the ideas and feelings, including a sense of involvement; of being engaged in the task. Unfortunately, many teachers seem overly concerned with the conventions, the more observable product, perhaps because it is easier to pay attention to those features. Perhaps, too, because we can argue convincingly, in an instrumental sense, for attention to such features. Teachers and parents may not be convinced that the less observable product has value other than that of passing interest. Unacceptable, perhaps, is the notion that writing as a product with emphasis on ideas, feelings and a sense of engagement, has cognitive and psychological advantages for children.

Inherent in the assertion that the less observable product has value is that the activity of writing has value. In fact, when we argue for writing in which there is a sense of engagement, where ideas and feelings are thought to be of significance, our emphasis, at least to a large degree, moves beyond the product to the writer - to his feelings his ideas, and inevitably to the process whereby these elements were produced. And this is where another difficulty lies.

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Even if we agree that the activity, the process of writing is of value and should be a concern of teachers we do not know a great deal about this process. We may know the product desired. We may be able to argue strongly for greater emphasis on content, but of the actual process of composing we know very little.

Nevertheless, what do we know? There are at least two strands of development which are of interest. First, the work of Britton, Martin and the Rosens, et. al., in the United Kingdom, and second, the work of Graves, Emig and Sawkins and others in the United States. The former tend towards an analytic approach, the latter, a more empirical one.

Through the development of a theoretical model of language functions Britton has been able to suggest the likely progression of children's writing. The expressive mode (language which remains close to the speaker) is central for young children, but as they get older their writing tends to branch more and more towards the instrumental or transactional mode (language to get things done), or alternatively, tends toward language in the poetic mode - the end result being an artifcat of language. The model gives us a perspective on the possible development of written language within the individual child, and with such a perspective comes, perhaps, a greater sensitivity to the activity of writing as such. Further, Britton's full explication of his model argues for greater emphasis on "expressive" writing in the elementary school as a significant aid to the child's cognitive and psychological development.

With or without the aid of Britton's model, part of the British tradition, in some of the more informal schools, has been a concern for the quality of children's writing - a quality which suggests that the writer has tried to do justice to his experience. Concern has been with the experience being portrayed, rather than with the "basic skills", the conventions used to help portray that experience, although, of course these conventions cannot be ignored. The product then is viewed primarily in terms of its content and the feelings and ideas it contains and its sense of engagement, which in turn directs attention not only to the individual writer but to the process of writing and how well the child is handling that process. The Rosens have tended to look at children's writing from this point of view, looking in particular at the practices of teachers who seem able to evoke engaged, committed writing from children. Teachers who are concerned with the activity of writing as well as the product. But, commendable and useful as these descriptions of practices are they do not tell us a great deal about the process of writing, even if attention is directed to that process.

However, some insights into the process can be obtained by the study of both the finished product and the writer as he writes. Mulford and Martin suggest, "The process of writing seems to be primarily a matter of keeping the inward eye focussed on whatever bit of experience the writer wants to record or articulate, and letting the flow of words largely look after itself." (Jones & Mulford , 1971, pp. 155-6).

The child, then, must feel that his experience is of value and that to write of it is important. If these attitudes prevail then the process of writing is not a matter of tediously and consciously manipulating language but is a more intuitive activity. A pleasant thought, but how applicable as the child grapples with the difficulties of handwriting, and spelling, for instance? Is the process of writing more or less intuitive at different stages of development? And as the authors themselves suggest, at what point in the process does conscious manipulation become important?

The American research into the writing process does not answer these questions specifically, but it seems that some insights are being gained into the last two questions, at least to some degree.

Procedure:

(1) The night previous to the planned writing activity each of the children were asked to give some thought to the writing of a "good story" the next day. It was mentioned too, in the ensuing discussion, that the author required such assistance because of university studies.

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(1) Scott, 11 years, Amanda 10 years and Lisa 9 years. . ../5

(2) The writing was carried out in the lounge with the children sitting in various positions - the author sitting with pad and pencil making notes about the children's comments and questions and general behaviour as they wrote.

(3) Except for a ten to fifteen minute break the children wrote for approximately one hour and ten minutes with Amanda writing several minutes longer than both of her siblings.

OUTCOMES

First, I am aware that this is an idiosyncratic study which has no general applicability. Nevertheless, it has its interesting aspects several of which are suggestive for the teacher's role during children's writing.

OBSERVATIONS OF THE CHILDREN WRITING

Except for the first 12 to 15 minutes the children seemed pleased and happy to talk of what they were writing. They discussed the type of story, a little about content, and the length of their stories.

Perhaps, after the initial burst of writing activity some talk is motivational and mutually stimulating. Often, comments were directed to the author and it appears that a teacher's presence and interest is of importance, but should not be seen by children as merely mechanistic in that the teacher helps only with things such as spelling.

The interaction between the children did not appear to interfere greatly with their finished product, although some of the "errors" of punctuation and spelling, or story repetition, or slight faults in logical development may have arisen because of these interruptions. However, my judgement would be that the interaction was a positive occurence and to be valued. In the classroom, a seriousness of purpose would have to be maintained along with the interaction. The teacher would provide a focus for questions, comments and assistance.

Despite the interaction, all three children wrote individual stories. Even where similarities can be perceived which may have come about because of talk, all children take the notion and make it their own. Both girls have a tree or a plant which grows quickly and surprises the characters in the story. But the similarity ends there. Both Scott and Amanda use the term "scientist" but again in the context of their own stories. And this usage may have been coincidental.

The data was insufficient to unerringly categorize the children in terms of Graves' two types, and of course, his description tends to characterize general tendencies. But my impression would be that Scott tends to be a reactive writer and the girls tend to be reflective writers.

Scott took longer to start and claimed he didn't know what to write. He spent more time "thinking" about the activity and was more restless throughout, changing writing position, quite radically, on several occasions. As Graves notes, more boys tend to be reactive writers and Scott seems to fit this general pattern.

Both girls, seemingly, are reflective writers more than reactive, although Amanda did discuss her writing, more frequently and fully than the other two. The girls settled quickly, claimed they knew what they were going to write, and spent little time rehearsing. Somewhat contrary to Sawkins, we note Amanda's claim that she knew her story before beginning. Her later comments do not belie this claim. Lisa made the same claim, but we note her discussion where she contemplates a particular ending. At the time it is spoken of as a possibility, which, when her story is completed, has become the reality.

As Sawkins found, all three children asked to have words spelled. But contrary to Sawkin's findings some questions involved vocabulary and definitions, "How do you write about what a witch does?" (Amanda) "How big is a hectare?" (Scott) "When do nut trees ripen?" (Lisa) This difference is probably due to the situation and the particular constraints that operated. A classroom may be more restrictive because of larger numbers of children and the role of the teacher, especially as perceived by the children.

The teacher should not be seen merely as a technician - available only in an instrumental sense, but should also be supportive in a positive and sympathetic way. Reading parts of a child's story when asked, listening attentively to children's comments and allowing children some mutually helpful talk among themselves.

All three stories can be seen to be on the continuum between expressive and poetic writing. Scott's perhaps, is more towards the expressive, with Amanda's and Lisa's slightly closer to the poetic. Their stories demand a "sharer" who will accept each piece of writing as a completed construct. What is also of some interest is that the fantasy in at least two of the stories seems to have some relationship to current life-problems. Lisa has of late complained about being the youngest in the family. In her story, the girl's mother has her name changed to Elizabeth for the daughter to use, symbolizing possibly a more adult relationship between mother and daughter. Scott, although interested in having friends visit or going to friends' homes, refuses to do any of the inviting or inquiring. His story, however, has him inviting an elephant to dinner and thus surprizing his parents. In Amanda's story one of the tests for the heroes was their walk through a paddock containing a tall oat crop. Three years ago, as a family, we walked into and played in a 6 foot tall oat crop. Perhaps Amanda felt threatened by the experience? Do these relationships hold? If so, they seem to indicate the use of language in a spectator role reflecting possibilities to the writer's individual satisfaction.

WHAT CONSTITUTES A STORY TO THESE CHILDREN?

With both girls the influence of fairy tales is obvious. Remnants of Jack and the Beanstalk are apparent, and in Amanda's story The Wizard of Oz, Lisa has a talking animal that creates conflict which is resolved through explanation and subsequent understanding. Amanda's story clearly follows some of the functions of the fairy tale as outlined by Propp (1958): Two boys absent themselves from their families. They come across an accursed town. The boys agree to counteraction. They are tested; acquire the use of a magical agent; defeat the villainous witch, release the town from its curse; are rewarded and return happily to their families. Thus, the two girls between them use many components of the fairy-tale : animism, magic, certain functions inherent in fairy-tales, as well as the traditional beginning and endings.

Scott's story is humorous, as he claims. The elephant's ability to talk is not attributable to magic but to a scientific device - possibly remnants of animism and magic made realistic and feasible. It is clearly a story - certain crises, anticipation of climax, and a peaceful and satisfactory conclusion.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

(i) Each separate story, and the observable behaviour, reaffirm writing to be an individualistic activity. Graves' two general types of writer seems to help describe the three writers of this study.

(ii) Moderate talk about content, type of story and so on, throughout the writing activity, seems motivational. The children seem to require a focus for their talk about ideas, content, endings, and for their questions - as their story is being written. The teacher should be this main focus, although it should be noted that the children also discuss these matters with each other.

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Also, during the writing period, I was asked to read the story written to that point. Considerable help with spelling was required.

(iii) Throughout the writing period (over one hour) all three children were engaged and committed. Whether their writing is thus, to someone else, may be held in question. The stories are relatively ordinary. However, as noted, all children show a clear idea of story. All were happy with their product, although Amanda was not content with the conclusion to her story. The activity of writing appeared beneficial, as certain of the comments by the children and some of the outcomes suggest.

I do believe, however, that requesting the writing of stories from young children is akin to requesting a poem to be written. Children have notions of what stories and poems should be like and subsequently try to use these notions in their writing. Unless comfortable and confident with both the process and the idea of a specific kind of writing many children are likely to become inhibited and anxious when the teacher imposes such a task. In the elementary school at least to the age of 9 or 10 children should be encouraged to write but the form should be the child's decision. If children do write what could be called stories or poems then that is fine and to these children mention could be made of the fact, but in general , writing for young children should be undifferentiated. This is not to say, of course, that the teacher does not mention these terms in discussing literature and writing, nor is it implying a limitation on the range of models being presented, but simply that the teacher takes care not to <u>impose</u> a specific form when young children are seeking to write of their experiences.

PRE-WRITING BEHAVIOUR

SCOTT	AMANDA	LISA
Complained of not knowing what to write. Asked if he could write a known story to which a relatively non-committal answer was given. It took Scott 6 or 7 minutes to begin. His story, does seem fairly original although reminiscent in places of Zuess, A Fish Out of Water, a favourite book in early childhood.	Claimed she had her story all worked out and began straight away.	Concerned about features such as: Do I write a heading? Do I put my name near the heading? or at the end of the story? Complained about the lighting. Responded to Amanda's claim about having her own story worked out by making the same claim. (This may have been true to some degree. Her story is compact and clear, and once started she wrote with less stopping and starting and erasing than her siblings.)

DURING-WRITING BEHAVIOUR

For the first 12 to 15 minutes the only interruptions were for the spelling of words, a behaviour which continued intermittently throughout the writing session. After this period of relatively intense writing all three children discussed aspects of their stories. As the comments show, discussion centred on subject matter, length and type of story. All comment did not arise at this time but rather it was the beginning of comment, which tended, after the initial burst of writing, to continue spasmodically for the rest of the session. At various stages all children paused to re-read parts of their story. Scott tended to sit and think about or rehearse his story more than the girls - although Amanda made more corrections, mainly spelling, than her siblings. Each child took a short break of about 10 minutes during the session.

SCOTT	AMANDA	LISA
	I've got stacks to write. It's not that long in my mind, but when I write it down it is.	
Mine's not that long.		When do nut-trees ripen? *Answer given.*
	You can tell mine is a bit of another story. *That's allright, Manda.*	
Mine's sort of funny, about an elephant coming to dinner. Here's the first sheet. Do you want to read it. *Yes, okay.*	*To her mother.* Do you want to read what I've written? *Yes, but I'll read it later, Manda.* *Asked for the spelling of 'watered', and said,* I couldn't get that in my mind. Sometimes that happens to me.	
	Mine's not funny. Mine's going to be quite long. They go up into the sky and have to solve a problem.	Mine's not funny either. What's yours about Scott? *Answer given.* Oh, like the tiger who came to dinner.
It's about an elephant coming to dinner.		
How do you spell 'hectare'? Is that too big for an elephant? *Well, its about as big as the schoolground.* Oh, that's too big, he's coming to dinner.		
	How do you write about what a witch does? *Do you mean 'cast a spell'?* Yes, casted a spell. *No, cast a spell.*	

Cont'd.

SCOTT	AMANDA	LISA
	Oh, I'm getting a bit pooped. *Well, have a break then. But, this suggestion was not acted upon until later.*	
Scott decided to have a break for about 10 minutes. Resumed writing with virtually no re-reading or checking.	Would 'no one' be 'kn'? *Answer given.* Is it one word?	
	What's that stuff that grows really high, not wheat or corn - over Lisa's head? *Oats?* Yes.	
	Ten minute break taken.	
Went to check on the word 'Decaton'.	*Returned and spent 3 minutes reading over the last two or three paragraphs.*	
Dad I spelt 'Decaton' wrong.		
		Ten minutes break taken. Very little checking of previously written work.
	What are you up to in your story Lisa? Has yours got a lot of 'saids'?	
		I've got lots of 'ands'.
	So have I, a lot of 'and thens'.	
		Both girls compared the number of lines written.

Cont'd.

SCOTT	AMANDA	LISA
	What's yours about Scott? Mine's about these two boys up in the clouds. One boy likes poetry. You know how I keep spelling 'town' - 'twon'?	
		I had to say all the time. Sue's mother did this and said that so I changed her name to Elizabeth. In this story Elizabet husband has gone away to work, or something like that.
		That's why he's not in this story. But he might be in the end.
	I think mine's going to be six pages. *Isn't it coming to an end yet?* Oh yes, it's coming to an end every minute.	
		Is yours coming to a conclusion, Lisa? What do you mean? *Is it coming to an end?* Yes, after her father comes home and they become friends and that.
	Mine's like a fairy tale and it's a bit true, too.	
		Mine's a bit like a fairy-tale in one of those books with lots of fairy-tales like one of those.
	Oh, this is going to take longer than I thought.	
	At the ending it could have been better.	

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by SCOTT
11 years.

An elephant came to dinner.

I was having dinner one summer night and I was wondering what it would be like to have a elephant for dinner. And a special thing he could talk. I don't know how I could get an elephant to talk but I read in the newspaper that scientists are commicating to them. And luckly enough my dad is one of those scientist and he told me that you use a device to commicate with the elephant. So I told my dad if I could have one. The next day he showed me how to use it. And that was step one and I quickly move on to step two to get a elephant. So I went to a place near dad's work were there are elephants were they experiment on them and I met Mr. Smith my best buddy. Nearly every day after school I help him feed the elephants. I had a favorite elephant called Deakaton. He got his name because a Deaka means 10 metre and ton means 1 ton so he is 10 meters long and weights 1 ton. And when we feed the elephant sometimes they go wild and break loose. About a month ago Deakaton broke loose and I grab a bucket of peanuts and went after him and I was throwing peanuts at him and he slow down and I raced up to him and he ate the peanuts in the buckets. Then Mr. Smith came runing down and he said I will give you anything. So I discuss it with Mr. Smith and he rembers. Then I said if I could have Dekaton for a day and Mr. Smith said yes and that was step two. That night I asked Mom if I could have a visitor and she said yes. So I went outside and brought Dekaton in I had a bit of trouble getting him through the sliding door. When he got in Mom thought that she was seeing things but it was true. Then dad came down from washing up and he could hardly talk then after Mom and Dad got over it I explained it. Then we move the table so Dekaton could fit in then Mom saw the carpet packed down you could see were Dekaton went. Before dinner we put the device on so that Dekaton could talk. Mom served a roast and Dekaton had four chickens and two buckets of peanuts and for sweets he had two waffles and he spilt the syrup over him and he could n't get it off. So he had to have a bath but not in ours the water will overflow said Dad. So then we think we to take him just the I had a great idea take him down to the city baths we took him down to the baths as fast as we could and every one thought it was a earthquake and people came running out. When we got there every-one had to get out we strayed the syrup with water and it was coming off. After the syrup was off we had a

pitcure taking by the press and we got interveiw after that we went home and we didn't know were to put Dekaton because he was going to sleep the night because Mr. Smith was away for the night and he had the keys. We decided to put Dekaton down in the basement and we had to move the pool table and I got a sleeping bag and Mom told me to stay away just incase Dekaton roll over so I did one time I woke because Dekaton was snoring and there I saw his trunk go up and down and I got on top of him and made a bed and went to sleep.

Amanda
Age 10 years

Howards and Johns mystery plant

Once there were two poor boys walking down the street there names are John and Howard. John liked to read poems and Howard liked to play games. It was a Saturday afternoon and it was hot. They were walking along the road when they saw a sign and it said The Black Woods so they went along that trale when they reached the woods they were hot and tired but they wanted to walk on because in the middle of the forest it is nice and cool so they walked on they were so tired that they had to stop and they did. John was saying poems on the way. Then Howard saw a funny looking plant it looked like a big long foot and it had long fur on it, the boys went to sleep near the funny plant. they woke up and the funny plant had grown higher so they dug it out and carried it to Howards back yard and planted it near his window. That night Howard watered the plant, he went to bed early because he wanted to get up early to see how tall it might be that morning. when Howard was asleep the plant got taller and wider. The next morning Howard woke up at 6.15 he looked out the window and the small plant had reached the sky. then he got dressed and run to Johns house and John was runing to Howards house to see what that big plant was and Howard said it is the small plant that we planted yesterday then they walk back to Howards house. they had some breakfast then they had a conversation on who was going to climb first. after about 10 min John said to flip a stone so they did and Howard lost so he had to go first it took them half an hour to reach the top when they did they meet a town no one was there so they wanted to go home but the plant wasn't there so they walked around the town for a while then they saw a clock and it said 7.00 and all of a sudden it rang 7 times and all of the town people came out and went to work and John and Howard noticed that they were walking on there hands not there feet. then a man on his hands came over and said why they are walking

on there hands. One day one of our scientist made gold and it was in the news and up north there is a witch that wanted the gold but she could not get it and then she cast a spell on the town people to walk on there hands and it has been very difficult to work ever since. Then the boys thought for a while. Then the town man said that there is 2,000 dollars reward to kill the witch then John said in a poem that bad things are bad and good things are good we will kill the witch for good. Then the town man said that his his name was Isa Willum then the two boys said that there names were Howard and John they had lunch with the man and they said that was the most best lunch they have ever had, after lunch Isa showed them a map on how to get to the witches castle it was through a forest with bats and snackes and poison ivy it scringhed teribble then they had to go through a fild of oats if they get through the forest fast the oats wouldn't be past your sholders. If they went in the wrong birection through the forest it will that them three days to go through the forest then the oats will be over your heads and when you go through the oats you must weeve a roape when you are going through the oats or you will get lost. It took them 2 hours to get ready they had dinner and then they went to the forest and all the people were waving with there feet John said that it is strange with people waving with there feet. They went through the forest. Before they went to sleep they had to find a clear spot to sleep they walked for 3 miles that night remembring to go north at 7.00 they went to sleep. the next morning they had breakfast and then got a stick that morning they forgot to go north and they went East because they saw some quick sand and that is how they got to go East they walked for 5 miles that day then Howard noticed that they were facing East and that night they had to go back to where they saw the quick sand it took them 3 hours to get to the quick sand that night they had to make up what they had missed that night. The next day they went to sleep for 6 hours then

they had brunch. They walked for 8 hours and they remembered to go north that day they got to the oat fild they went to sleep the next morning they had brunch it took them 15 min to get ready they rememberd to tie the rope to each other it took them one day to get through the oat field, they saw 8 snakes then when they where at the eage of the oat field they saw the witch and the witch took them prisoners they got to the castle and when they were getting into the cage and Howard cut the witches hand and took her wond then Howard put a spell on all of the witches helpers and saved the prisoners. When they were getting out of the castle they remembered that the witch had an air -plane they took the wond and took of in the air -plane then the next morning they got to the town and they bracked the spell and broke the wond. Howard and John was pleast to get the money and the plant had grown up to the sky and they got down and went home and told there mum and dad what had hapen and they lived happly ever after.

BY LISA
AGE 9 YEARS

Hector in Trouble

Once upon a time there was a squirrel called Hector. He lived in a tree in Sue's backyard. Sue and Hector always played together, Sue helps Hector find nuts and Hector helps Sue get into trouble but she dosen't mind. One sunny morning Sue's mother came outside to plant a seed she forgot to bring home the shovel and asked Sue to dig a hole and Sue lets Hector dig it. The seed that Sue's mother was going to plant was a nut tree Sue had always wanted a nut tree of her own. One summer morning Sue got up to water her nut tree and when she got outside she couldn't beleave her eyes the tree was full with nuts. Then she ran inside to tell her mother, her mother was half asleep and thought it was a dream and just said wow. And then Hector woke up and was wondering what was all the noise about and then he couldn't beleave it, a big tree full of nuts. And Sue was still inside having her breakfast and Hector climbed out of the tree and got two or three little bags of nuts and when he was geting his last bag of nuts Sue and her mother were coming out and Hector didn't know where to go and Sue's mother was closing her eyes so she can get a surprise and Sue was in front leading her to the tree when Sue saw Hector and if Sue let her mother see Hector she would get a broom and try to hit the squirrel that was getting the nuts off Sue's tree and Sue had to tell her mother to go back inside and Sue's mother said why and Sue didn't know what to say and Sue just said, I have to fix the tree up and make it look nice. Then Sue gave Hector his last nut and told him to go back to his tree because Sue's mother was scared of squirrels and Hector went back to his tree and Sue showed her tree to her. Then the tree was in flowers and Hector went out to pick some and Sue got some to, to put in the house. One Sunday morning Sue's mother was going to change her name because she got sick of Sue calling her mother. So that day she had her name

changed to Elizabeth and Sue liked that name but Hector didn't and Hector asked Sue why she changed her name? And how come she changed her name? And when she was telling Hector why she changed her name it got dark and Sue said that you better to to bed now because Mum and I are, well nigh-nigh Sweet dreams. Well when Sue and Elizabeth turned off their light Hector was still in the grass and didn't know where to go so Hector found a crack in the house and went in and found a blanket to put over him and in the morning Elizabeth woke up and saw a furry thing in the bed and Elizabeth yelled. And Sue woke up to see what the mater was and Hector was lying their sound asleep and Sue took Hector to his tree and Hector said what am I doing in your hands and Sue said what were you doing in Mums bed and he told the whole story to Sue. Then a few months later Sue's father was coming back and Sue couldn't wait and the next day Sue was going to show Elizabeth the squirrel and she was going to get the broom when Sue told her and they became very good friends and they all helped each other with things and Sue's father already knew Hector and he bought home another squirrel called Isabel and they both made friends and had two little squirrels a boy and a girl and from now on Hector didn't get any one into trouble again and they all lived happily every after and they hope that the two little baby squirrels don't get into trouble.